

Your Mileage May Vary

As the crow flies, Gilroy to Bakersfield: 157.5 miles. Same debarkation and terminus points via freeway and primary roads: 216 miles. The scenic, memorable and no-doze MMOC road-path: 371 miles.

Buried deep within a chasm in central California lies a winding ribbon of asphalt roadway encapsulated by the heavenly Los Padres National Forest mountain range on the west and beautiful and pastoral oak-studded pastures and rich-soil farmland on the east. Mere miles from the Pacific Ocean's cooling salt air breeze, our 24 motors and lone chase vehicle are meandering through this hidden metropolis of ranchettes and bazillion dollar estates which begins in Monterey and terminates in Greenfield, just north of King City. We accessed this wonderment of Laureles Grade Rd. (G20) and Carmel Valley Rd. (G16) after a leisurely ride from our overnight stay in Gilroy, the meet and greet point where riders from 4 states converged. This day we're in solitude on a path seldom traveled and almost designed for single-track travel. We've all seen wealth, yet rarely in such a bucolic setting. As we merge back onto U.S. 101 we have an 11 mile sprint to our lunch stop at the excellent Mediterranean themed Stravaganza Grill, 611 Canal Street in King City. Within 15 minutes, our two groups of riders were one, and with 114 miles in the log book, lunch time.

Let's take a gander at the suspect leather-clad ensemble sitting round-robin with kissers aglow from sensory and palate overload: From Broadmoor PD, returning Queen Bee Mary Ann Mann; Pasadena PD's verbose Past President of MMOC Terry Blumenthal, San Jose PD's cackling Paul Salerno and Jerry and Robbie Albericci; Contra Costa County S.O.'s Herman Rellar; from San Francisco Doug Foss with Anna, Al Luenow and Ed Callejas; current President of MMOC Alameda County S.O.'s Mike Rores and wife Jeanie; representing LAPD is Herr Baron Laetzsch and the Williams clan of father CK, sons Ken with wife Gwen and Ryan and his lovely chase vehicle driving wife Cam. Bakersfield was represented by Steve Armbruster and Chris Norman. Rhoda and yours truly along with Cliff Heanes and wife Mickie *tried* to represent Oakland PD along with Cliff's Honorary brother Jeff and Honorary gourmet sausage company owner Nick Nicosia, who has so aptly supplied our annual Cioppino Feed for years. Another welcome addition to our ride this year is Huron PD Sgt. Chuck Rabaut and wife Theresa and San Jose Airport aviation company owner Doug Bensing. Pilot and Photographer extraordinaire Phil Ponzio returned once again to capture each of our missteps and tomfoolery on Kodachrome 400.

An unseasonably *cool* 90 degree afternoon is refreshing as we once again mount up and seek the remote sweeping turns of G14 (Jolon Rd., Interlake Rd., Nacimiento Lake Dr., Godfrey Rd., etc.) through Fort Hunter Ligget then onto the more challenging series of on-camber,

undulating roller coaster switchbacks skirting Lake Nacimiento. Perfect tarmac and numerous elevation changes in pastoral countryside give way to our merge into rustic Paso Robles for a short freeway trek to the new and excellent Holiday Inn Express @ Atascadero and night number two. We've just completed 191 road miles of extraordinarily scenic back country which shall provide hours of discussion, you know, like mine's faster than yours, mine's bigger than yours, why such a fast pace, etc., etc. ad nauseam! The women are giddy over a two-plus hour indoor wine and cheese tasting party; therefore, we of the male persuasion are too, as we bake poolside telling war stories and lies.

At our requisite morning riders' meeting in sunny 65 degree weather, we discuss our route to Bakersfield and the remote possibility of having to don a cool-vest *later* if temperatures rise drastically inland. For now, we're off to the coast via beautiful fog shrouded Ca. 41 over the summit at Devil's Gap and then break out 16 miles later into Morro Bay. Socked in and mere feet from the Pacific Ocean with temps hovering in the low 50's, we traveled through their verdant state park to Los Osos Road and back to US 101. Within 60 miles of departure it's time to top off several bikes in the *coastal* berg of Nipomo before an inland jaunt of 90 miles to lunch. Standing within spitting distance of me, and gas nozzle in hand, someone who failed listening comprehension 101 has chattering teeth while wearing his mesh-tex jacket *and* water soaked cool-vest which has naturally gravity flowed to his crown jewels. Hypothermia and shrinkage aside, I assured Herr Foss he'll begin to blow dry in the next hour-and-one-half as we now tackle the *warmer* climes of Ca. 166 and then Ca. 119 into Taft! This beautifully winding road that once again wends its way over the Los Padres National Forest and through the Carrizo Plain National Monument is a contradiction unto itself. No cars, no services, no residences, no trees, a lot of nothing, and hundreds of square miles of scrub brush in dry creek beds; yet an adventuresome-motorcyclist's delight! Polar opposites of fresh grassy aromas and petroleum distillates compliment one sense, the long and winding ascent to the 3,000 foot summit and corresponding steep, short and high G-load descent into Taft tickles other fancies.

Now to placate our palates: Jo's Family Restaurant in Taft was a wonderful find thanks to Google. Serving this oilfield community of blue-collar workers until 1400 hrs. daily, a simple phone call 48 hours in advance had our group of 31 seated in a huge back room with multiple waitresses serving two long tables of hungry riders' delicious Mexican and American dishes. There was love in the air too. Cliff Heanes "Touring" group spewed accolades of route choice and serene pace while some of my "Sport Touring" flock waxed eloquent of minimal traffic, steep lean angles and great line-of-sight on sinewy Ca. 166. Ed Callejas thanked me profusely for our choice of cuisine, too. "Great Mexican food in the middle of nowhere", Si Señor. All too soon it was time to vacate our air conditioned bliss en masse and ride the last 36 miles to Bakersfield in uncommonly cool 95 degree weather. A nice respite from the seasonal norm of 105+, it's OK to don your cool-vest *now*, Doug! Oh, I forgot, it's already on.

An early arrival into Bakersfield finds us poolside (where else?) at the Best Western Crystal Palace where one and all congregate to unwind after two days on the road. Within minutes of the first verbal salvos, out of the lobby came LAPD's J.J. and Julie Leonard, a very pleasant surprise! You see, J.J. had been under the weather for a few months and a couple weeks before we left, he made the command decision to not push it and wait 'till next year. Then, to cement the issue, a week later Baron Laetzsch called him to see how he's doing and break the news he's got to cancel at the 11th hour too due to total brake failure on his GL1500 that requires parts from the fatherland. With that, JJ said to drive from Show Low, Arizona, pick up his Harley and ride it! It truly pays to have a class-act friend and generous former Motor partner.....forgo the ride but show up in a cage to share in the camaraderie! Now we had an L.A. trio entertaining with fables of decades past and 20 or more other talking heads competing for bragging rights. Most of the women sought refuge in the expansive pool, far removed from the manly B.S. that could have backed-up the most modern of sewage treatment plants!

All too soon it was time to sashay next door to the Buck Owens Crystal Palace, stomp our feet to live country music and partake of God's own seared beef. And while the most intelligent of our flock ordered lamb chops and rare beef, a few twits were later overheard grumbling about the fresh fish entrees they ordered. Hellooooooooooooo, a geography lesson: Last time I checked, Bakerspatch is in the middle the central valley's largest cattle and sheep raising region, faaaaaaar removed from a deep sea port or large fresh water lake, and, if it had such a body of water, the radioactive minnows and crustaceans would taste like oil! Sleep on it!

For our last day of riding on this excellent adventure, we have a short 45 mile trip up to Lake Isabella via Ca. 178 which follows the beautiful Kern River through a massive granite-rock sheer-wall canyon. Climbing some 2500 feet, we are in a procession behind one of Kern Counties Finest as he heads out to his beat like a heat seeking Scud missile in search of a Taliban owned Krispy Kreme franchise. No grumbling, we're on his terms as he safely adds 5-10 over for our scenic ride. Coffee and Breakfast at Nelda's Diner helped dissipate the cobwebs and prepare for our return trip. We've just ridden Ca.178 as I had last done in the 70's; why not venture to Ca. 155 at Wofford Heights and set passage west for a new challenge? AAA's topographical view shows a slightly squiggly course for 50 miles to Ca.65 and then a straight 27 mile sprint through the Oildale District back to the hotel.

DO NOT BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU SEE ON A FREAKING AAA MAP! From Wofford Heights, the next 25 miles carves an insane gnarly path up and down and sideways and sometimes backwards along canyon walls, pastures and farm fields filled with free-range killer cows and suicidal horses that sculpt steamy meadow muffins and barn biscuits on the roadway capable of sucking the boot off your foot if you dab wrong, Homer! Elevation changes of 2,000+ feet *several times*, no straight section of tarmac more than 200 feet long and continuous blind

switchback corners ensure great upper torso, cardiovascular and respiratory exercises coupled with migraines of the highest order! The last 20 or so miles before terminating into the Porterville Highway were a God-send. Fresh asphalt, two 14+ foot lanes and gentle, rolling and sweeping line-of-sight turns were the norm. Where it took us an hour to get to Lake Isabella, this ridiculous misnomer of a California "*Highway*" required almost 3 to get back! At the hotel lobby, I received several West Oakland single-digit, middle-finger salutes from grumbling riders not feeling the love! And, as Chris Norman parked his K1200 brick-motor BMW, the rear tire rubber valve stem blew off.....the only casualty of our 3 days on the road.....an instant flat!

Anger management issues aside, beers flowed, barbs were exchanged and a discussion ensued on locations for next year's ride at, where else, water's edge. Later, we sashayed 300 feet south to an excellent hole-in-the-wall Mexican restaurant for margaritas and authentic cuisine. Kudos were heaped on Cliff Heanes for once again ably spearheading the "Touring" segment of riders, thereby allowing this geriatric scribe to drag the more adventurous of us within the "Sport Touring" group into spirited tomfoolery! On this year's ride, we sought out ribbons of asphalt with a yellow striped serpent snaking through hill and dale back roads. Four hundred and ninety three miles in our geographically compact riding area are testament to the discoveries that await those who live for the ride, as opposed to the destination. Meander off the freeway as we did, and damn near anywhere in America you'll find challenging roads, scenic roads, fast and slow roads, mountainous roads that dip from the heavens above to valleys below and even "no roads" with a State "*Highway*" designation. To all the participants, thanks for a wonderful ride and your colorful banter, and to the readers of this tome....no farm animals were violated during the course of this fable.

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His Own Self, Dennis M. Brown

